

THE GIFTS OF FORTUNE, NATURE, AND GRACE AND
THE STRUCTURE OF *PIERS PLOWMAN* B.XI

Jay Ruud

No one has ever claimed that *Piers Plowman* is generally a model of clarity. Some parts are murkier than others, however, and certainly the coherence of passus XI in the B-text is especially difficult to determine. Judith Anderson, for example, comments that in this passus "Langland positively lists toward chaos" (81): here, after Scripture's upbraiding, the narrator Will falls into his first "inner dream." He is whisked away to spend forty-five years following in Fortune's train. He then debates Lewte and Scripture concerning law, faith, and predestination. The emperor Trajan then breaks in abruptly to tell how living a just life saved him, with the help of Pope Gregory's mediation and prayer. A long apparent digression follows, in which the virtue of patient poverty and the scourge of unlettered priests are discussed. Then suddenly Nature takes the Dreamer to a high place where Will complains against Reason about human beings' failure to live according to Nature's laws and then awakens. Events of the inner dream seem to follow no discernable structure, but seem rather randomly linked, indeed like events in a dream.

Beginning her discussion of this passus, Sister Mary Clemente Davlin sums up the difficulties of this "fragmented" section of the poem:

It introduces numerous speakers who appear and disappear, carrying on apparently unrelated discussions from contradictory points of view. The text itself is confusing: there are sections where we do not even know who is speaking, and although the passus has been the subject of long and fruitful analysis, there is still very little agreement about the meaning of certain obscure lines and about the outcome of some of the interchanges. (67)

Yet this episode seems very important: James Simpson argues that this complex vision is "the turning point of the poem" (118). It is hard to disagree that this passus is pivotal: remember that the A-text of *Piers* had ended after the crisis of passus X, in which, as Simpson asserts, Will had come to question the value of learning and, indeed, of all moral action (116).

Certainly there have been a wide variety of critical attempts to discern the structure of the passus. Davlin sees the passus as unified by "the ruling theme [of] the relationship between poverty and riches, if one takes those words in their widest senses" (67), so that there is a "frequent and shifting" pattern in which "images of misery and fleeting glimpses of true and false comfort succeed one another" (84). James Simpson sees the inner dream as having two parts (two different perspectives of "Myddelerthe"), "each inspired by a separate visionary experience" (118). Malcolm Godden says that the "underlying structure in passus xi and xii" is that "conflicting authorities present a variety of views on the issues of salvation," the "linking element" of which is "the question of the role of the clergy" (99). Most radically, Thomas Ryan, citing an earlier article by Gordan Hall Gerould, suggests that there are in fact two inner dreams: the land of longing (XI.5-83) and Kynde and Reason on the mountain (XI.320-406). According to Ryan, "in the time frame of the *poem*, no time elapses between Scripture's '*Multi multa sciunt . . .*' (XI.3) and her '*He seith soop*' (XI.107), even though in the text the first inner dream intervenes. Thus the inner dreams and Scripture's sermon should be imagined as going on simultaneously" (Ryan 219).

The fact that there are such varied explanations of the structure of the passus merely underscores the difficulty of the passus in question, particularly the difficulty of making coherent sense of its structure. Of particular difficulty is the middle section of the passus: while some critics have seen Fortune and Nature as parallel, no one has successfully explained the role of the Trajan episode in the structure.

Because of this scene's pivotal importance in the poem, it is worthwhile to look more closely at the structure of this apparently unstructured passus. I don't presume to be able to solve all the difficulties of the passus, but I believe that if a clearer structure for the passus can be determined, it may help to answer some of the other questions the passus raises. What overall pattern can be seen that makes coherent sense out of the inner dream as a whole? What is the function of the strange Trajan episode, which seems to force itself suddenly and from nowhere into the text? How is that episode related coherently to what comes before and after it in the passus?

I contend that the structure of the inner dream is based on the conventional medieval triad of the gifts of Fortune, of Grace, and of Nature. This scheme provides a simpler and clearer explanation of the structure than any of the previous explanations, and it does demonstrate how the central Trajan episode fits coherently into the structure of the passus.

Discussions of these three gifts abounded in popular religious treatises in the later fourteenth century and cannot have been unknown to Langland. That the tradition was a part of the popular religious consciousness of common people is suggested by the Host's comment that the "yiftes of Fortune and of Nature / Been cause of deeth to many a creature" (VI, 295-96) in response to Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*.¹ Generally, these three sets of gifts were discussed as potential objects of sinful pride—either vainglory or presumption. The sections concerning Fortune and Nature are easy to see in passus XI. But I will argue that Trajan's episode is intended as an illustration of the gifts of Grace (by which he was saved), and, like the other two parts of the passus, a warning against presumption resulting from pride in God's gifts. The three-part inner vision is introduced by a passage in passus X in which Will has delivered a despairing diatribe against theologians, for which Scripture chastises him at the beginning of passus XI for what she seems to regard as his presumption. While it is many

other things as well, the inner dream, considered as a coherent unit, is an exploration of the ways in which the three gifts may lead to the sin of presumption.

I want to look first at the tradition of the gifts of Fortune, Nature, and Grace as it developed in some of the popular religious treatises of the fourteenth century. Langland very likely would have been familiar with these treatises. His readers were almost certainly familiar with them, if one considers the kinds of texts with which *Piers* was associated in the manuscript tradition. In the words of A. I. Doyle,

[I]f I ask myself what manuscripts of other works do many of those of *Piers Plowman* most resemble the answer is . . . lengthy religious poems of apparently wide circulation in more than one region, well-established by the end of the fourteenth century outside the metropolis, and probably much handled in later trade there. (47)

He specifically mentions *The Prick of Conscience* and *Handlyng Synne* among other such texts (44).

Handlyng Synne, then, may be a good text with which to start, since it is among the earliest I want to deal with, dating from ca. 1303. Robert of Brunne does not categorize the gifts of God into those of Fortune, Nature, and Grace, but rather lists a number of gifts—birth, wisdom, beauty, strength, riches, good voice, power, learning, horses and hounds, favor of the king—and dismisses them one after another as unworthy objects of our pride. Ultimately, Robert condemns any kind of pride in the gifts that God has given us:

3yf þou euer vndrstode
þat þy wyt or þy gode,
come of þy self, and nat of god,
Hyt ys grete pryde and falsly troud. (109; 3103-06)

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In another early text, the *Cursor Mundi*, Pride is characterized as commonly springing from three things: Fortune, Grace, and Nature:

[M]en may find þare er thre thinges
þe whilk pride riueliest of springes.
Of werldes hap, of grace of kinde,
als men may in sere bukes finde.

(Cotton Galba ms., 27552-55)

Fortune, or "werldes hap," includes clothing, food, property, riches, honor, and the like, but also a sweet voice and ready tongue, and a lady's love:

For werledes hap, als clath or fode,
Hows, or rent, or oþer gude,
Erthly honowre, or priorte,
Welth, or lordschip, or pouste;
Grace or vertuse, or gude fame,
Grete wirschip, or worthi name;
For steuin swete, for redy tong,
For ladis luf, or maydens 3ong. . . . (27560-67)

The gifts of Nature include skill, beauty, nobility, and intelligence:

For kind, for craft, or for gentrise,
For fairhed, or for wit of prise. (27568-69)

Holy living is a source of pride as well in the *Cursor Mundi*—it seems the only gift mentioned here that falls into the category of a gift of Grace:

And oft if falles þat sum man es
Bycumen prowde for halines. . . . (27570-71)

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Dan Michel's *Ayenbite of Inwyt* or *The Prick of Conscience*, dated ca. 1340, ranks the three sets of gifts as small, middle, and true gifts. The lower gifts are the gifts of Fortune or time. According to Dan Michel, God gives us the gifts of Fortune to comfort us and to draw us to him:

þet god ous yefþ / ous to solas. And uor oure loue to dra3
to him. uor þet he wot þet we byeþ fyebile / and tendre.
(77)

Riches we are told, are not true happiness. Instead, they can be tools of the devil to entrap souls:

Vor þet byeþ þe dyeules ginnes. huer-by þe zaules ine a
þousond maneres he gyleþ / and nymþ / and bynt and halt.
(77)

Riches are not evil in themselves. They are, as Michel says earlier, God's gifts. There are some who serve the world through their wealth, and this is the proper use of riches.

The middle gifts Dan Michel calls the gifts of Nature, among which he also includes the gifts of "learning." Among these he lists "uayrhede of bodye. prouesse. strengþe. zuyfthede. mylideness. clyer wyt. sle3þe. onderstondynge" (78). But just as the gifts of Fortune cannot be true happiness, so the gifts of Nature (including learning) cannot make people fully good, because many philosophers are now in hell:

Vor many filozofes / oþer of greate clierkes / and of
kynges / and of emperours / þet hedden moche of zuyche
guodes: byeþ ydampned ine helle. (78)

Those who have received these gifts from God have the responsibility of using them appropriately:

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Vor þe ilke to huam god heþ yyeue þe ilke graces / and þe
ilke guodees / þet ich habbe beuore ynemned god uor to
serui. and helpe his nixte. bote yef he vsy treuliche: he ssel
by ine þe more gratter torment. (79)

The most likely misuse of the gifts occurs if they cause one to become proud:

huanne hi ham yelpeþ / oþer hi ham prodeþ / ond oþren hy
onworpeþ. (79)

The “true goods” in *Ayenbite of Inwyt* are gifts of Grace, specifically virtue and charity. Dan Michel does not believe these gifts can possibly be misused or prick human beings to pride. Instead, he says, “zoþe guodes helpeþ eche daye / and ne harmep neure” (79).

But *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, a late-fourteenth-century Midland analogue of the Kentish *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, gives a much more elaborate discussion of the three gifts under its discussion of Vainglory, the fifth branch of the sin of Pride. The work is a translation of a French original, the *Somme le Roy* of Frère Laurent of Orleans, dated about 1279—a work sometimes cited as influencing Chaucer’s Parson’s Tale. Here, the goods of Nature, Fortune, and Grace are listed as the three branches of Vainglory. The goods of Nature are divided into goods of the body and goods of the soul. Those of the body include health, beauty, and strength, as well as good tongue and good voice (which the *Cursor Mundi* had assigned to the gifts of Fortune). Further,

þe goodes þat a man haþ in his soule is cler witt to
vnderstonde wel, sotil vnderstondynge for to fuynde wel,
goode pynges of long mynde for to wipholde wel. (19)

Thus understanding, reason, and memory are the chief gifts of

Nature to the soul. All gifts are good; the danger is in taking pride in these gifts:

of al þis schulde euery man þanke God and serue hym, for
al comeþ of hym and in hym is al; but þe proude man
silleþ hem to þe deuel for þe false peny of veyn glorie, and
warieþ God ofte for alle þilke goodes wherfore he scholde
þanke hym (20)

The gifts of Fortune listed next in this text include "hi3enesses, honoures, riches, delices, prosperites" (20). These too can easily lead one to vainglory: "Of al þis he gladeþ him & glorifieþ hym as a wrecche in his herte, so þat he wot not were he is" (20).

The Book of Vices and Virtues lists the "goodes of grace" last. Here are listed only "vertues & goode dedes" but these are particularly dangerous to the "beste men, þat bep men in holynesse" (20). Particularly important for Langland is the fact that one danger posed by the goods of Grace is when one possessed of these gifts "desireþ & purchaseþ loos & þanke in suche entente to be holde good in þe world, and not for God" (21). This, as we shall see, relates specifically to his views of the clergy in *passus* XI.

The extent to which this pattern of the three gifts had filtered into the popular consciousness of the later fourteenth century can be seen in its use in sermons of the day. For example, in a St. Nicholas Day sermon found in British Museum ms. Royal 18 b.xxiii, dated after 1378, the preacher examines the kinds of gifts that move people to pride:

som ben proude of 3eftes of grace, as ypocrites, þat holden
hem-selfe holier þan þei be. Som ben proude of here witt,
þat God haþ graciously 3eue hem, þat my3th haue made
hym a fooll whan hym lykeþ. Som ben proude of 3eftes of
kynde, as of bodely stren3ght or of bodely bewte, and 3itt

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þe fayrest man þat leueþ and also þe strengest God may
make hym ryght fowle and ryght febull lesse þan in an
houre. Som ben prowde of goodes of forteyn, as happes
þat falles to hem, as ryches of worldely good. And so
what man þat is prowde in anny poynte of pride, he
desyreþ hi3nesse a-boven all is oþur bretheren, þat
parauntur is to-Godward hi3ere þan he. (50)

The preacher here sees as most important the fact that God can at any time take back the gifts he has given humankind through Fortune, Nature, or Grace. It is absurd, then, to take pride in these gifts. Hypocrisy, holding oneself holier than one truly is, is a particular danger with the gifts of Grace. Again, this will become important in Langland's passus XI.

The clearest fourteenth-century summary of the tradition of the three gifts is, as is often the case, in Chaucer. In the Parson's Tale, Chaucer lists the three gifts as the source from which springs the sin of Pride:

Now myghte men axe wherof that Pride sourdeth and
spryngeth, and I sey, somtyme it spryngeth of the goodes
of nature, and somtyme of the goodes of fortune, and
somtyme of the goodes of grace. (X. 449)

Like *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, Chaucer divides the gifts of Nature into those of body (strength, beauty, agility, noble birth) and those of the soul (intelligence, understanding, imagination, memory):

Certes, the goodes of nature stonden outhur in goodes of
body or in goodes of soule. / Certes, goodes of body been
hele of body, strengthe, delivernesse, beautee, gentrice,
franchise. / Goodes of nature of the soule bee good wit,
sharp understondynge, subtil engyn, vertu natureel, good
memorie. (X. 450-51)

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The gifts of Fortune include the standard riches, honor, and fame:

Goodes of fortune been riches, hyughe degrees of
lordshipes, preisynges of the peple. (X. 452)

But Chaucer's list of the gifts of Grace is fuller than those of any of his predecessors, and specifically contains learning (here clearly a gift of Grace and not Nature, as in Dan Michel) in addition to items not mentioned in the other texts, like the ability to withstand temptation or to suffer spiritual travail, as well as kindness and virtuous meditation:

Goodes of grace been science, power to suffer spiritueel
travaille, benignitee, vertuous contemplacioun,
withstondynge of temptacioun, and semblable thynges. (X.
453)

None of these gifts, Chaucer concludes, should move one to presumptuous pride:

of whiche forseyde goodes, certes it is a ful greet folye a
man to priden hym in any of hem alle. (X. 454)

This is the tradition that lies behind passus B.XI of *Piers Plowman*. The passus opens, remember, as Scripture rebukes Will for his presumption in the previous passus:

Thanne Scripture scorned me and skile tolde,
And lakked me in Latyn and light be me she sette,
And seide, "*Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt.*"
(XI.1-3)

The Latin allusion to the pseudo-Bernard (Wittig 2121) chastises the Dreamer for presuming to know much when he does not even

know himself. As Malcolm Goddard says, this suggests

that the anti-intellectualism with which the previous passus had ended was a piece of arrogance on the part of the dreamer That is, it was a false confidence in the perfection of his own life that led the dreamer to disparage Clergie or learning. (91)

Will has presumed to criticize scholars and point out the pitfalls of theologians without truly knowing himself and his own faults. The rebuke sends him into a paroxysm of anger and grief that forces him into the inner dream. The reason for the odd "dream within the dream" format is, according to Simpson, to suggest that the dreamer is now "engaging deeper, more emotional aspects of the self in the resolution of intellectual problems" (119). Following from Scripture's admonition about self-knowledge, the inner dream shows Will traveling deeper into the self.

Fortune is the subject of the first part of this inner dream. The Inner Dreamer abandons his search for Dowel and becomes obsessed with Fortune, following her for some forty-five years, perhaps, as Goddard suggests, because Langland had abandoned his text for several years between the frustrating end of the A text and his taking up the story again with the B text (88). In Fortune's trail are three hangers-on that tempt the Dreamer into sin: they are, of course, the three temptations of Christ in the wilderness—"Concupiscencia Carnis" or Lust of the Flesh, "Coveitise of Eighes" or Lust of the Eyes, and "Pride of Parfit Lyvyng" or Pride of Life. And Pride of Life, Elde tells Will, "to muche peril [will] thee bryng" (XI. 33).

It would seem that gifts of Fortune, through lust of eyes and lust of flesh, would lead one chiefly to the sins of lust and greed. But it should be emphasized none of the three sets of gifts, Fortune's included, is evil in itself. Rechelesnesse is in fact correct when he tells the Dreamer that lust of the eyes and lust of the flesh will "ne

bigile thee but thow wole" (XI. 41)—that is, they won't deceive you unless you *want* them to. Making the gifts a source of pride is the chief problem with them. That pride in riches or honors or fame or other gifts of Fortune—that is, Pride of Life that Elde warns against—is the main danger in the Dreamer's following Fortune is implied by Rechelesnesse, who tells the Dreamer "A man may stoupe [that is, show humility] tyme ynogh whan he shal tyne the crowne" (XI.36). Assuming that Rechelesnesse is the personification of the inner quality of the Dreamer, one could easily interpret the Dreamer's reckless disregard for his soul as presumptuous—the arrogance of overconfidence that there will always be time to repent later. If the gifts of Fortune distract one from focusing on what is necessary for salvation, then they are the cause of presumption, as they are here. The Dreamer ignores the warnings of Elde until forty-five years have passed in Fortune's train, and he confides in the Friars who have been his easy confessors that he wants to be buried in his own parish churchyard. No longer blinded by the gifts of Fortune, he desires to return in humility to the parish in which he was born. Significantly, and characteristically, the Friars—themselves misled by the gifts of Fortune represented by the money they stand to make at the Dreamer's death and burial, are opposed to the idea.

The end of passus XI, and the third part of the inner dream, concerns Nature. Here Kynde—not the often-personified goddess Natura but a male "Kynde," suggestive of the Creator God (see Schmidt 33)—shows the Dreamer a panoramic view of created nature. The vision, justly compared by critics to an Edenic paradise, displays all of nature working in perfect harmony. Ryan calls it "an innocent and beautiful natural world," in fact "the 'prelapsarian world of Genesis' in which the Dreamer is in the position of Adam and in fact 'recommits Adam and Eve's sin'—particularly, when he 'rebukes Reason and blames him for not regulating human behavior as efficiently as he controls nature, he succumbs to the sin of *subergia vitae*'" (Ryan 224-26).

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What disturbs the Dreamer is that human beings are the only creatures in this vast panorama of Nature that are out of step with the perfect harmony of the cosmos. He says,

Ac that moost meved me and my mood chaunged—
That Reson rewarded and ruled alle beestes
Save man and his make. . . . (XI. 368-70)

The Dreamer blames Reason for the error—an act for which he is later accused, once again, of presumption. As Schmidt points out, the word *mood* in line 368 “refers primarily to his feelings or disposition generally, but . . . also carries overtones of ‘pride’” (34). Schmidt goes on to say

[t]hat this rebuke to reason springs from resentful pride is . . . explicitly affirmed by Ymaginatif at the end of the passage, when he has woken abruptly from the inner dream. . . . Will cannot see that his obsession with “reasoning” is really a manifestation of mood. (34)

Though the passage has to do with Nature and with presumption, it is less clear that it suggests that the gifts of Nature may be the cause of presumption. In the first place, it could be argued that the lines focus chiefly on the observation of external nature, and not on the gifts of Nature to human beings. In the second place, the passage mentions none of the gifts commonly associated with Nature—such as beauty, for example, or strength or noble birth. But on closer examination, the passage is concerned with external nature only as it contrasts with the inner nature of human beings. In the Parson’s Tale as well as in *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, a distinction was made between gifts of Nature pertaining to the body (including things like health, strength, agility, beauty, and nobility of birth) and gifts of Nature pertaining

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to the mind: among these latter gifts are superior intelligence, understanding, imagination and memory—that is to say, the attributes of Reason.

The Dreamer believes that he knows better than Reason itself—or, further, than Kynde himself—and so attacks the way that God has created Nature, including human nature. But it is one of the gifts of Nature, his own intellect, that has led him to see this flaw in creation. Thus the Dreamer's reason, a gift of Nature, has led to his presumptuous chastisement of Reason and Nature itself. In response, the character Reason points out Will's presumption—"Recche thee nevere / Why I suffre or noght suffre—thiself hast noght to doone" (XI. 375-76) he says. Patience, Reason tells Will, is in fact the highest virtue. Now Langland may associate the quality of patience with the gift of Grace that Chaucer calls "power to suffer spiritueel travaille," or perhaps Langland sees it as a gift of Nature that Chaucer would have called "vertu natureel." In any case it is a gift that the Dreamer does not possess. His presumptuous reliance on the gift of Reason has underscored his lack of the more important gift of patience. The sin of presumption, and the importance of accepting the gifts of Nature without pride or complaint, is behind Reason's spirited rebuke of the Dreamer:

De re que te non molestat noli certare.

For be a man fair or foul, it falleth noght to lakke
The shap ne the shaft that God shoop hymselfe;
For al that he wrought was wel ydo, as Holy Writ
witnesseth:

.....
For man was maad of swich a matere he may noght
wel asterte
That some tyme hym bitit to folwen his kynde.

(XI. 393-401)

Even when he awakes, the Dreamer is chastised by "oon" (who turns out to be Ymaginitif) for the same thing. For criticizing

something that was none of his business, Will has made Reason unwilling to instruct him, and "Pryde now and presumpcion paraventure wol thee appele / That Clergie thi compaignye ne kepeth noght to suwe" (XI, 421-22). The passus ends as the Dreamer experiences humiliating shame for his presumption.

Thus the first and last sections of the passus, dominated by the traditional allegorical figures of Fortune and Nature, may be seen to complement one another in warning against the presumption that might arise from the gifts of Fortune or of Nature. But the long and sprawling middle section of the passus—beginning with Lewte's advice to Will on publishing his poem and moving through Scripture's sermon about the wedding feast and Will's reaction to it, Trajan's interruption, and the long digression on poverty and on uneducated priests—is much more difficult to see as fitting into a preconceived pattern of the three gifts. To begin with, there is no traditional allegorical figure. Secondly, we do not see the Dreamer engaging in any obvious acts of presumption as we do in the other two sections of the passus. And perhaps most importantly, it is difficult to see how the tradition of the gifts of Grace lies behind the events of this passage.

But what are the gifts of Grace? This tradition is less defined than the other two. Chaucer lists "science" or learning as one of them. He also lists "virtuous contemplacioun," or meditation, which might suggest that the power of prayer might be thought of as well as a gift of Grace. Baptism (the acceptance into the Church), or even more so Ordination (a priest of the Church being by definition particularly possessed of learning or "clergy") may also be seen as gifts of Grace. The middle passage of this passus cautions against taking sinful pride in any of these gifts by undercutting them, one by one.

First consider Scripture's sermon, which summarizes the parable of the wedding feast in which "many are called but few are chosen":

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“Multi to a mangerie and to the mete were
sompned;
And whan the peple was plener comen, the porter
unpynned the yate
And plukked in Pauci pryveliche and
leet the remenaunt go rome.” (XI. 112-14)

The text has a devastating effect on the Dreamer, who questions whether he is one of the elect:

Al for tene of hir text trembled myn herte,
And in weer gan I wexe, and with myself
to dispute
Wheither I were chose or noght chose. . . .(XI. 115-17)

He argues that as a Christian, as one who has been baptized, he has the right to enter the feast. Even if a Christian wanted to renounce his faith, he could not do so, according to Will,

For though a Cristen man coveited his
Cristendom to reneye,
Rightfully to reneye no reson it wolde. (XI.125-26)

The problem with his argument is that, once again, it borders on the kind of presumptuous confidence that Rechelesnesse had displayed earlier. Scripture's response to Will's claim recognizes this: she agrees that

“ . . . may no synne lette
Mercy, may al to amende, and mekeness hir
folwe. . . .”(XI. 137-38)

That is to say, no sin can prevent God's mercy, *as long as* meekness or humility follows the sin. Humility (the opposite of Pride) is a necessary ingredient. Stating that the parable of the

wedding feast "stresses both the openness of God's invitation, and the austerity of His judgment," James Simpson calls this "the intellectual and emotional pivot of the whole poem," since in seeing the problem as intensely personal "rather than merely theoretical," Will begins his conversion (121-22). Whatley points out that what Will concludes—that "no matter how sinful and careless of good Christian conduct he has been, the sacrament of baptism has made him a member of Christ's church, involving him in a legal bond with God that he could not break out of even if he wished"—was an attitude consistent with most of Langland's contemporaries who saw Christianity as "essentially a sacramental, legalistic religion" (51). Ryan contends that Trajan's appearance is specifically designed to "embody that element of the parable which most directly refutes the Dreamer's mistaken concept of baptism—the wedding garment" (Ryan 220): specifically, "by depending on the mere reception of baptism to save him, the Dreamer puts himself in the position of the unfortunate wedding guest" (223).

Thus baptism in and of itself—a gift of Grace—is not sufficient. Nor is learning, as Trajan asserts with his striking first line, "Ye, baw for your bokes!" (XI. 140). Trajan is a pagan released from hell, not through having lived a Christian life and not through Christian learning.² Nor, contrary to most versions of the medieval Trajan legend, was it the power of Gregory's prayer that saved him. All of these—baptism or membership in the Church, learning or clergy, and the power of prayer—are gifts of Grace, but one should not take pride in any of them. Trajan is saved by none of them. "Al the clergie under Crist ne myghte me cracche fro helle," he says (XI. 144). He is saved "withouten syngynge of masses, / By love" (XI. 150-51) because he had lived a life of love. Love is what saved him, and not any of the gifts of Grace. In this Langland was modifying the long tradition of the Trajan story in western literature. Gordon Whatley says that Langland's version of the Trajan story "represent[s] the almost complete negation of the

original meaning and purpose of the legend," which had been to extol St. Gregory (50). Further, "Trajan's story is intended to demonstrate to Will that sacraments, rituals, church laws, and all the formalized system of mediation and grace administered by the Church and her clergy are useless unless they are informed with the spirit of love" (Whatley 51-52). In Langland, unlike earlier versions, "Gregory did not actually pray for Trajan but only wept for him [and] Trajan was outside the Church's sacramental system when he was saved" (Whatley 52-53). By downplaying the power of Gregory's intercession, Langland downplays the gifts of Grace and quells any presumption one might be inclined to feel because of these gifts.

Elizabeth Doxsee has written that Trajan's salvation challenges "Will's preconceived notions" about who will be saved, since it demonstrates that "no one can predict who will open himself up to grace." Indeed, she goes on to say, "Will has tended to give too much credence to the ability of 'bokes' and 'clerkes' and his own 'kynde wit' to unravel the mysteries of salvation," so that "the final lesson that Will learns is one in intellectual humility" (310).

Church doctrine, as written in books by learned clergy, might insist upon the necessity of baptism for salvation. The law of the Church might demand it.³ That law might be seen as another of the gifts of Grace—certainly Jews have always seen the Law as God's greatest gift to man. But Trajan specifically says that neither of these things—"Ther no clergie ne kouthe, ne konnyng of lawes" (XI. 165)—could have saved him, but love did. "Lawe withouten love," he asserts, "ley ther a bene- / Or any science under sonne, the sevene arts and alle! /—But thei ben lerned for Oure Lordes love, lost is al the tyme, / for no cause to cacche silver therby, ne to be called a maister, / but al for love of Oure Lord and the bet to love the peple" (XI. 170-74). Certainly money and academic titles belong to gifts of Fortune, but the learning and the position in the church that are used to obtain these things are gifts of Grace. Remember that in *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, holy living for

the purpose of looking good in the world rather than for God's sake was listed as the chief danger in the gifts of Grace: "desireþ & purchaseþ loos & þanke in suche entente to be holde good in þe world, and not for God" (21).

Thus as in the other two sections of the passus, the Dreamer's presumption—his confidence that his baptism and learning, the gifts of Grace, will save him—is corrected and in no uncertain terms. The emphasis on humility that ends both the Fortune section and the Nature section of the passus is much longer in this passage on the gifts of Grace: poverty, the guarantor of humility, is extolled, for we are told that poverty, accompanied by patience, "Maketh a man to have mynde in God and a gret while /to wepe and to wel bidde, wherof wexeth mercy" (XI. 262-63). And while the gifts of Grace are not to be used as excuses for presumption, neither are they to be ignored or denigrated. Priests, for example, need learning. They should not simply rely on their "croune" (XI. 299) or clerical tonsure to receive a benefice, but should cultivate learning for the purpose of glorifying God: "So is it a goky, by God! That in his gospel failleth / Or in masse or in matyns maketh any defaute" (XI. 306-07).

Just who is speaking here (from lines 154-319) is a matter of some disagreement. At the end of the passage, the dreamer says that "Ac muche moore in metyng þus wiþ me gan oon dispute (XI. 320), just before Kynde sweeps him away to see the wonders of created Nature. But the antecedent for "oon" is frustratingly vague. Harwood surveys the opinions: Wittig (255), citing Skeat's opinion, says it is "Lewte." Adams says the lines are anonymous (390). Frank (60) and Fowler (219) assign the speech to Trajan; Chambers (136), Donaldson (173), and Clopper (277-78) assume the speaker is Will. Clopper points out that in the C-Text the lines are uttered by Recklessness, who is identified with the Dreamer (Harwood 192). Harwood himself assumes the speaker is the Dreamer as well (78).

Recently, Ernest N. Kaulbach has identified the "oon" of line

320 with Ymaginatif (who is clearly the “oon” of the later line 408), an identification that was earlier made (as Andrew Galloway points out) by Alastair Minnis (81). Galloway, however, in his review of Kaulbach contends that it is just as likely that the “oon” of line 320 refers to Trajan, or that it “displays the passive Middle English construction for ‘one,’ which may also stand for ‘many’”—that is, that the sense of the line is “and much more while dreaming was I thus being disputed with” (153). This last suggestion merely serves to underscore the uncertainty of attributing these lines to any of the characters of the inner dream.

In the other two sections of the passus, the Dreamer is led to the recognition of his own presumption through interaction with characters involved in the dream narratives of Fortune and Nature. If that pattern holds here, it seems most likely that the speaker of these lines is indeed Trajan, since nowhere from the time Trajan begins speaking in line 140 until the speech ends at line 319 is there any indication that another character begins to speak. The fact that some of the lines are out of character for a “pagan” to utter is not as important as that the lines clearly come from a spokesperson against the misuse of the gifts of Grace, and Trajan, the embodiment of Grace received, is an ideal representative of that view. However, my interpretation really does not depend upon Trajan as speaker here: the important point is the emphasis on misusing the gifts of Grace.

This emphasis on the correct use of the gifts of Grace also explains the beginning of this middle passage, in which Lewte encourages Will to publish the things he has seen in his dream. The ability to recognize societal wrongs and to plead for their correction is a gift Grace gives to Will through his dream. What he fears is that he may be accused of hypocrisy—that is, that his condemnation of these ills will be interpreted as arising from pride. Remember that the St. Nicholas Day sermon cited above specifically warned against hypocrisy, a “holier than thou” attitude, as a possible danger springing from the gifts of Grace. Lewte

assures Will that such is not the case with his dream-vision: for “‘wherof serveth lawe,’ quod Lewtee, ‘if no lif undertoke it— / Falsenesse ne faiterie? . . . It falleth noght for that folk no tales telle— / Though the tale were trewe—and it touched synne” (XI. 91-100). Of course, one’s motives must be free from egoism. “No thyng that is privé, publice thow it nevere; / Neither for love laude it noght, ne lakke it for envye” (XI. 105-06). Thus Lewte’s advice feeds directly into the discussion of the proper use of the gifts of Grace.

My purpose here has not been to claim that I have the key to ultimate understanding of this complex passus; nor has it been to deny the value of previous studies of this section of the poem. I have said nothing, for example, about Langland’s semi-Pelagianism in the Trajan episode, which is crucial for the poem as a whole. I do believe, however, that the tradition of the three gifts allows the reader of Langland to see some coherence in passus XI, and may explain how some episodes in this passus that appear random to readers today are in fact related to the rest of the episodes. The emphasis on the gifts of Grace explains the relationship of the Trajan episode to the beginning and end of the passus. The importance of properly using the gifts of Grace clarifies the transitional speech of Lewte that leads into the middle section of the passus, and the speech of Trajan (or whichever of Grace’s spokespersons delivers the lines) that leads into the vision of Kynde at the end. Langland may indeed “list toward chaos,” but at least in passus XI there seems to be a great deal of evidence of design.

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Notes

¹ The only scholarly discussion of the common medieval triad of the gifts of Fortune, Nature, and Grace applied to literature that I am aware of is Gerhard Joseph's article on Chaucer's Physician's Tale. In the article, Joseph relies chiefly on the Parson's Tale for evidence.

² Most discussions of Trajan are concerned with the difficult problem of Langland's semi-Pelagianism, and this is not the place to deal at length with that issue. The reader interested in the problem can look at some of the following studies: Adams asserts that the issue of grace is central to Trajan episode, and sums up philosophical opinions of the day:

A standard theological principle in his day addressed this issue by distinguishing good works from meritorious ones and by insisting on divine freedom. Absolutely speaking . . . God owes no one anything, and good deeds, of themselves, have no salvific value. Nevertheless God is under a self-imposed obligation . . . in that he has freely agreed to honor good deeds as though they had either full merit (*meritum de condigno*) or half merit (*meritum de congruo*), depending on the spiritual condition of the one who performs them. Hence God has mercifully created a system whereby a sinner may "earn" his favor. (95)

Given this line of reasoning, Simpson says of the Trajan episode, "At last Will is able to see how works, even though they clearly cannot match the standards of God's absolute justice condignly, can nevertheless meet the standards of His conditional justice congruently" (126). Gordon Whatley, in reviewing the entire tradition of the Trajan story in the Middle Ages, concludes that Langland's version of the story clearly "refutes the Dreamer's

conviction that works have no meaning in the Christian universe, and seeks to discredit any reliance on a sacramental system that ignores 'trupe,' justice, and righteousness" (Whatley 51-56). Godden, following Whatley, sums up: "Traditionally, Trajan had been the exception who proved the rule, that baptism was essential for salvation . . . Trajan was thus the great example of the heathen who was saved, but only through exceptional circumstances." In showing a Trajan saved by his own works, "Langland takes a traditional symbol of papal and clerical power and turns him into an argument against the external forms of religion" (93). Vitto suggests that the Trajan episode, coming as it does after Scripture's agreeing with Will's comments about baptism, creates a problem of two conflicting "extreme positions": "a baptized Christian must perforce be saved; but, on the other hand, baptism is not a prerequisite for salvation" (65). But Davlin says that these positions are resolved in the text: "[W]hereas some speakers seem to attribute Trajan's salvation to his good works and others to grace, the puns in the text balance the two causes of salvation and resolve the controversy in a remarkable way." Trajan says that he was saved through "loue and . . . my lyuyng in trupe" (l. 152). But there is a possible pun on Truth, which has been used for the divine name, so that living in truth (or living in "human righteousness") here also means living in God—thus "both God and virtue [are] the sources of Trajan's salvation" (Davlin 72). For a dissenting opinion, see Harwood, who does not believe in Langland's semi-Pelagianism (79).

³ Certainly the prevailing popular opinion in the Middle Ages saw no salvation outside the church. But the possibility of the salvation of the heathen was not unusual among theologians. For a summary of medieval attitudes, see Dunning, who discusses Hugh of St. Victor, St. Bernard, Albertus Magnus, and Aquinas.

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